

KBSNA sessions to be held at AAR/SBL Annual Meeting in Boston, Nov. 19-20

Again this November there will be two sessions sponsored by the Karl Barth Society in conjunction with the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature in Boston. The first session will be on Friday afternoon, November 19, with a second session on Saturday morning, November 20.

INVITATION TO MEMBERSHIP IN THE KARL BARTH SOCIETY

All who are interested are invited to join the Karl Barth Society of North America.

To become a member of the Barth Society, send your name, address, and annual dues of \$15.00 (\$10.00 for students) to:

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Checks (drawn on a U. S. bank) should be made payable to "Karl Barth Society." *Members whose dues were last paid prior to November of last year are encouraged to send in their annual renewal.*

The Friday afternoon session will be held from 3:45 to 6:15 p.m. in the Hynes Convention Center, Room 111. The program will begin with a presentation by **Douglas Farrow** (McGill University). His topic will be "**Karl Barth on Christ's Ascension.**"

The rest of the Friday session will feature a paper by **Eberhard Busch** (University of Göttingen) on "**Charlotte von Kirschbaum's Theological Contribution.**"

On Saturday morning, from 9:00 to 11:30 a.m., there will be a discussion of *Charlotte von Kirschbaum and Karl Barth* by **Suzanne Selinger**. Prof. Selinger will comment on her book, followed by two appraisals—from **Katherine Sonderegger** (Middlebury College) and **William Werpehowski** (Villanova University). The Saturday morning session will also be in Room 111 of the Hynes Convention Center.

Center for Barth Studies hosts first conference— "a huge success"

The following report on the Barth conference this past summer was written by George Hunsinger, Director of the Center for Barth Studies.

Over three hundred people packed Trinity Episcopal Church in Princeton for the international conference on June 17-19, 1999 that kicked off the new Center for Barth Studies at Princeton Theological Seminary. When the venue shifted to the Mackay Campus Center Auditorium, there was standing room only.

"For the Sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology," the conference theme, attracted participants from all across the United States, a sizeable contingent from Canada, and visitors from as far away as Korea, Europe, and Great

Britain. Roughly forty percent were pastors and ten per cent were lay people, with students and professors making up the rest.

Among the events were a splendid reception at the Center of Theological Inquiry, worship with a powerful sermon by William Sloane Coffin, Jr., and a memorable banquet in the Mackay Main Dining Room that sparkled with Mozart string quartets, delightful reminiscences of Barth as a teacher by John Godsey, and an award of appreciation to publisher William B. Eerdmans, Jr.

Many participants commented that it was the best conference, or one of the best, they had ever attended.

The participants were welcomed by seminary president Thomas W. Gillespie and by myself, the Barth Center's director. I was pleased to announce that the Center had just concluded negotiations enabling it to purchase the library of the late Markus Barth, the New Testament professor and son of Karl

Barth. A special division of the Barth Center will be devoted to Markus Barth's letters, papers and books. Recently, moreover, a hand-written autograph copy of the Preface to the third edition of Karl Barth's epoch-making *Romans* has been donated as well. The Center will continue to seek materials of archival interest.

A stimulating start to the conference was provided by John Hart. Currently serving as a Presbyterian pastor in Upper Montclair, New Jersey, Hart presented the results of his doctoral research at Oxford on the Barth-Brunner correspondence. This fascinating exchange, spanning nearly four decades, will soon appear in the Barth *Gesamtausgabe* (the series of mostly posthumous writings that now fills two whole shelves, with more yet to come). One hopes that these letters will also appear in English. Responding to Hart was Princeton's own Daniel L. Migliore. Recently installed as the Charles Hodge Professor of Theology, Migliore showed once again why he has inspired generations of PTS students to study and treasure Karl Barth.

After breaking for the reception and then dinner, the conference reconvened for an evening session on "Karl Barth and the Jews." Two eminent Barth scholars with expertise in this area were on the docket. Well-known as Barth's distinguished biographer and as his successor in theology at Göttingen University, Eberhard Busch spoke on "covenantal solidarity" between Jews and Christians in Barth's thought. Katherine Sonderegger of Middlebury College was the thoughtful and learned respondent. Barth's provocative, controversial and tough-minded views received sympathetic yet critical attention.

The next morning began a full day of sessions and presentations. It is a great irony for those drawn to Barth by his linking of traditional faith with progressive politics to see him become a symbol in the U.S. of reaction. Clifford Green of Hartford Theological Seminary and David Hollenbach of Boston College evoked Barth as a public intellectual who was constantly embroiled in political controversy. They effectively retrieved his social relevance for today.

A worship service then followed led by Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, professor of pastoral theology at Princeton Seminary, that included Coffin's preaching on "You Corrupted Your Wisdom for the Sake of Your Splendor."

After lunch the participants were delighted by an airing of the 1961 BBC television interview with Barth, in which he says that if he hadn't been a theologian he would have liked to be a traffic cop.

Barth's doctrine of providence was extensively explored by Caroline Schröder of Bonn University and then deftly placed within the history of doctrine by Notre Dame's Randall Zachman.

Before adjourning for the banquet, a panel discussed "the future of Barth studies." Led by Prof.

Bruce McCormack of PTS, recent winner of the prestigious Berlin-based Karl Barth Award for the excellence of his work on *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* (Oxford, 1995), the panel included Eberhard Busch, John Webster of Oxford, and Hans-Anton Drewes, director of the Karl Barth-Archiv in Basel. Drewes rocked the conference with his musing that the axis of Barth studies may actually be shifting to the United States.

The final day of the conference included a brilliant paper by philosopher Caroline Simon of Hope College comparing Barth and André Trocmé on Christian love followed with a seasoned, equally brilliant response from theologian John Webster.

The conference closed with a paper I presented on "Mysterium Trinitatis: Karl Barth's Conception of Eternity." The respondent, Brian Leftow of Fordham University, sadly unable to attend because of illness, wrote in his reflections that Barth had fully christianized the doctrine of eternity for the first time by re-locating it within an explicitly trinitarian context, as my paper had shown.

The proceedings of the conference will be published by Wm. B. Eerdmans.

KBSNA Executive Meets June 17 in Princeton

A meeting of the Executive of the Karl Barth Society of North America was held on June 17 at Princeton Seminary during the CBS conference. Present were Steve Crocco, Donald Dayton, David Demson (General Secretary), George Hunsinger, Joe Mangina, Paul Molnar, James Nelson, Russell Palmer, and Hugh Reid.

The first matter discussed was how the KBSNA could assist the Center for Barth Studies in its collection of works by and about Karl Barth. It was recommended that a request be published in the Newsletter that members of the Society, when reducing their libraries, donate materials by and about Barth to the Center, and also that members be requested to bequeath the "Barth section" of their personal libraries to the Center. Members were encouraged make the same request by word of mouth to interested friends (especially any who do not receive the Newsletter). It should be noted that Princeton Theological Seminary will pay the shipping charges and will issue tax receipts to those who donate such materials. The Executive recommended that such requests for material by and about Barth be put on the Center's web site. It was also suggested that, whenever a member publishes a book or article or review having to do with Karl Barth, a copy be sent to the Center for its collection.

At the 1998 meeting of the Executive in St. Paul it was agreed that the KBSNA should concentrate its

efforts on the establishment and encouragement of reading groups of (primarily) pastors. The purpose of these groups would be the reading together of Barth's works. Ron Goetz agreed at that time to direct this new effort. The Executive requested the Secretary to ask Professor Goetz if he is still willing and able to direct the program.

The Secretary was directed to consult with Wayne Stumme about the possibility of KBSNA seminars or discussions with (some of) the speakers at the Barth-Bonhoeffer conference to be held at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, July 24-26, 2000. Such sessions might be conducted during the conference or on the day following.

A brief discussion took place on how the Barth Society and the Center for Barth Studies might best support each other. The Director of the CBS and the General Secretary of the KBSNA were asked to formulate recommendations to be brought to the next meeting of the Executive.

It was agreed that Katherine Sonderegger will replace Ellen Charry on the Executive. The members of the Executive for 1999-2000 are: S. Crocco, D. Dayton, D. Demson, C. Dickinson III, R. Goetz, R. Huetter, G. Hunsinger, L. Malcolm, J. Mangina, P. Molnar, J. Nelson, R. Palmer, H. Reid, S. Selinger, K. Sonderegger, and W. Stumme.

The Barth-Brunner Correspondence:

John Hart's presentation and Daniel Migliore's response

One of the highlights of the Princeton conference in June was John Hart's informative paper on the correspondence between Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, the bulk of which occurs from 1916 to 1936. As Daniel Migliore remarked in his response, "Hart's paper has whetted our appetite for his soon-to-be-published book as well as for the actual texts of the Barth-Brunner correspondence now being edited by Eberhard Busch for the *Gesamtausgabe*."

Hart claims that a reading of the 110 letters enables us to see that the famous break over the issue of natural theology in 1934 "was the culmination of several long-running theological arguments between them." Accordingly, Hart uses the letters to trace the relationship between the two men from its beginning to its breakdown. He asserts that "if Barth felt it necessary to cut himself off angrily from Brunner, a theologian so close to his own position..., it must point to certain vital commitments held by Barth which he would not compromise." Hart sees in the letters "how radically and consistently Barth works out his fundamental insight from 1916—that 'God is God and

God is God.'" Hart also cites in this connection Barth's call in a 1930 letter for "a theology which, like a spinning top, supports itself on only one point."

In the course of summarizing and quoting from the letters, Hart focuses on "five interactions between Barth and Brunner that illuminate the shaky beginning and steady deterioration of their theological alliance."

1. The Object of Theology (1916). The first letter from Brunner responds to Barth's sermon on "The One Thing Necessary," in which Barth declares that "we should begin at the beginning and recognize that God is God." Brunner confesses to having difficulty doing this, and reproaches himself for his personal spiritual vicissitudes. Barth responds with wise pastoral counsel, concluding with the firm assertion: "I do *not* believe in your unbelief." Hart sees this exchange as an indication of Barth's theological objectivism as opposed to Brunner's characteristic emphasis on the human side of the divine-human relationship.

2. The Method of Theology (1920). Brunner takes Barth to task for confusing "the dialectical No" with "the critical No." Brunner is impressed by the second edition of Barth's *Romans*, but at the same time he is also reading Ferdinand Ebner's *The Word and Spiritual Realities*. Brunner falls under the spell of Ebner's "I-Thou," "divine summons/human response" philosophy, which leads him to look for divine/human continuities under the concept of "dialogue" rather than "dialectic."

3. The Foundation of Theology (1925). In response to Brunner's essay on "Law and Revelation: A Theological Foundation," Barth is uncomfortable with Brunner's undertaking, "which seems to me...to be 'somehow' too grandly designed (I still don't know clearly enough what theology is, so I can hardly venture to think about its relationship to philosophy...)." He also finds the execution of Brunner's undertaking "to be 'somehow' too simple, too unambiguous. (It's the same here as with your other works.... I see you giving answers where I am really first stirred up at discovering questions)." Barth feels that "in my work there remains an 'x' of which you have not laid hold." Brunner in turn chides Barth for being unwilling to become engaged with philosophy. Hart comments that "by 1925, the basic disagreement between Barth and Brunner is firmly set in place."

4. The Task of Theology (1930). Brunner's 1929 article on "The Other Task of Theology" sets forth his concept of "eristics," wherein theology will engage in polemics against the false assumptions of non-believers. Barth's rejection of such an enterprise brings him to the conclusion that, as Hart puts it, "the 'dialectical theology' movement has come to an end, torn apart over the issues of revelation's relationship to anthropology and philosophy," given Barth's

attachment to “a theology which, like a spinning top, supports itself on only one point”—a comment that Hart characterizes as “the correspondence’s most intriguing statement.”

5. Natural Theology (1932-1934). When Brunner criticizes the first volume of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* in an article on “The Question of the ‘Point-of-Contact’ as a Problem for Theology,” Barth in a letter renounces Brunner as a colleague: “It has grieved me to see gradually over the years and now completely clearly that we...want and intend something completely different materially, so that nothing now remains but for us to renounce the fictitious picture that there is a special solidarity in our work.”

A year or so later, Brunner drops Barth a note to warn him that *Nature and Grace* is about to appear and expressing the hope that, despite their disagreements, Barth will agree that they are fundamentally united. Barth agrees to no such thing. “It is too late now,” Barth replies. He sees the monograph as (in Hart’s words) “a severe challenge to Barth’s theological resistance to the German-Christians, and so Barth must answer it in that vein.”

The debate documented in Brunner’s *Nature and Grace* and Barth’s *No! Answer to Emil Brunner*, Hart concludes, “was the climax of a long-running disagreement over many issues.”

In assessing the contribution the correspondence makes to Barth scholarship, Hart observes that the letters support Bruce McCormack’s emphasis on the continuity of Barth’s thought rather than Hans Urs von Balthasar’s thesis of stages of development. And the correspondence shows that “Barth’s rejection of natural theology is grounded in theological, not political, reasons” since it goes back to 1929 and even 1925.

In the end, Hart concludes, “what separates Brunner from Barth is what separates Barth from every theologian—he builds his theology on a dialectical, actualist, and christocentric radicalizing of the Reformation *solas*.”

In responding to Hart’s paper, Daniel Migliore suggests that Barth’s idea of the object of theology was “more complex, even in 1916, than is captured by a contrast between ‘God in his revelation’...and ‘God and the believing subject...’” When Barth says “God is God,” that does not refer to a God in isolation from the world. It “means more than that God is infinite and transcendent.”

Again, when the difference between Barth and Brunner is described as a distinction between “dialectic” and “dialogue,” Migliore points out that Barth’s use of dialectic is not just “any sort of dialectic” but the particular dialectic of “the revelation and hiddenness of God’s presence and activity in Jesus Christ.” Migliore wonders whether Barth couldn’t have used the term “dialogue” (properly defined) just as well. It is not clear to Migliore that dialectical theology

vs. dialogical theology would have to be an either/or choice.

Migliore suggests that “a major material difference between Barth and Brunner...is in the area of ecclesiology.” And even though Barth in one of the earlier letters writes to Brunner that “we are not pietists,” Migliore is not so sure that Barth is correct in his assessment of Brunner. He comments: “While Barth was far more ‘catholic’ than ‘pietistic’ in his ecclesiology, the reverse was true of Brunner.”

On the other hand, while Brunner feared that Barth’s approach to theology might consign it to an ecclesiastical ghetto, Migliore thinks that “today we can appreciate Barth’s emphasis on theology as an ecclesial discipline far better than Brunner did. In a radically pluralistic society, it makes increasing sense to undertake what David Tracy calls ‘the journey into the particularity’ of one’s tradition as offering as good a hope as any of both doing responsible theology and making a contribution to the common good.”

BOOK REVIEW

Barth’s Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth’s Thought.

By John Webster.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. Pp. Ix + 222. Cloth U.S. \$30.00

Reviewed by David Demson

There is a rather longstanding, even if incompetent, tradition of commentary on Barth’s theology which asserts that Barth is indifferent or hostile to human ethical action. This tradition fails to note that what Barth opposes is a variety of modern theories of human ethical action, all of which are grounded in self-consciousness and circulate around affirmations about processes of human self-realization. In opposing these theories, Barth does *not* deny entitlement of humans to ethical agency.

Barth is a theologian who acknowledges that God is alive and active with us in Jesus Christ; *i.e.*, he is a theologian who acknowledges that in Jesus Christ God assumes our temporality in order to bring to an end its anti-humanity and from that ending to bring forth (*really* and not merely symbolically) a new humanity with freedom to act humanly. Barth can scarcely not be interested, and intensely so, in human ethical action. This is what Professor John Webster’s book is all about.

Webster reminds us that Barth gives notice that his theology is really a theanthropology, for in it he does not speak of God apart from humans or of

humans apart from God. Such a way of speaking, Barth believes, follows Scripture, which recounts God's acts with his people and the freedom God's acts bestow upon it; *i.e.*, God's acts free his people for the performance of corresponding acts to which God calls it. (Scripture also recounts, of course, many human acts in which God's people refuses to receive the freedom bestowed and the calling which accompanies it.)

Just as God's acts in Christ form the primary theme of Barth's theology, so too they form the primary theme of his ethics. His theology and ethics cannot be separated, since they share the same primary theme. In underlining this point, Webster makes two additional points: (1) Barth's ethical theology is more descriptive than theoretical. It is much more composed of rich, intricate exegetical descriptions of God's activity (which always calls for human response) than of theoretical accounts of the conditions of possibility. (2) What is true and good is acknowledged to be founded in the procession of God's acts with us, rather than located in the values which the human self discovers in or fabricates from its experience of the world.

Webster not only provides (in Chapter Two) an account of the tradition which has misread Barth's ethics, but also shows how its participants were implicated in the kind of (self-realization) ethical theory Barth opposed. Yet Barth is rarely a polemicist. Chapter Three demonstrates how Barth took up the concerns, if not the *tendance*, of neo-Protestantism. Webster's exposition of Barth's account of "conscience" in his Münster *Ethics* is especially illuminating on this point.

Because Barth is intensely interested in human agency, his unease with accounts of original sin (especially with those which understand it as inherited sin) is marked. According to Barth, sin is what we creatures will and do—it is not our fate or something we have "caught" (like a disease). Webster, noting that Barth is in the vicinity of Pelagius here, provides concise and helpful descriptions on how Barth, while insisting that we sin voluntarily, relieves the Pelagian threat by speaking of how we (1) are enmeshed in a collectivity of sinners and (2) have made ourselves subject to lordless powers (Chapter Four). Thus, redemption cannot be our achievement, but rather is a gift.

Yet even this (very nearly evident biblical) axiom has prompted neo-Protestant opposition. Having implicated itself in the theory of self-realization, neo-Protestantism has postulated the idea: if God acts, the human is quiescent; if the human acts, God is quiescent. It is as if God and his creature compete for the same space. Webster in two chapters delineates Barth's different account of the interrelation of God and his creature. The action of God (as the One who loves

in freedom) frees the creature for genuine human activity and calls upon the creature to perform it. Indeed, human action is genuine by virtue of its location in this God-human relation, since this relation constitutes the genuinely real world. Genuine human action is never, then, autonomous self-realization or the act of making oneself passive in the face of a stronger force.

In Chapter Seven Webster explains what Barth says about human agency in relation to Christ's prophetic work. Barth believes that false steps are taken when it is asserted that Jesus enacted his identity in the past and now the work of human creatures—hermeneutically or morally or sacramentally—makes him present and effective. Barth replies to such an assertion, formally, that Jesus Christ is not a predicate of our presence to ourselves, but rather we are predicates of his presence. Exegetically, he is the Light that enlightens our life; he is not the symbol of the sense we make of our life. Theologically, he makes himself present. But the Light does not make us humans darkness (although it reveals and overcomes our darkness). The Light kindles lights. We are called to proclaim the Light and explain it "in the constantly changing forms of human consideration, thought and expression."

In his final two chapters Webster compares and contrasts Luther and Barth on human agency. Luther finely demolished the notion that the human agent achieves self-realization through good works. But Luther's way of doing so, Webster thinks, leaves the human creature too passive. Yet Luther retains (in theory) more of human agency than Webster allows. First, Luther emphasizes that every day, indeed in every situation in life, the human in faith must struggle actively against the notion of self-realization. Second, the Christian in gratitude for God's grace wants to bear actively the neighbor in love, just as Christ has borne her in love. The limitation in Luther's ethics is not so much to be located in his passive-active dialectic (as Webster suggests), but rather in his lack of instruction about where Christians are to receive concrete direction for their activity with their neighbours. Here, as Webster rightly suggests, is where Barth is so strong. Broadly, Barth speaks of God's Self-limitation in his covenant relations with his people, in which God and his people are mutually determining agents. This broad statement is then explicated by a thick description composed of very many richly textured exegetical accounts of the direction humans receive in this relationship.

Webster develops the contrast between Luther and Barth by speaking of Luther's concentration on faith (as trust) and Barth's concentration on prayer. Luther enjoins us to trust God. Barth, of course, does not demur, but puts his emphasis on "our calling upon

demur, but puts his emphasis on "our calling upon God." This contrast between Luther and Barth, Webster argues in his final chapter, also differentiates Jüngel's understanding from Barth's. How so? Barth's position is: in prayer the Christian calls upon God to act. But, since God's coming to us in Jesus Christ creates an analogy between God's action and ours, our calling upon God to act always has its *analogans* in God calling upon us to act! More fully:

"Invocation of God in and with this prayer [for the coming of God's kingdom], obedient action in this vertical direction, implies (as the same obedient human action) the horizontal of a corresponding human, and therefore provisional, attitude and mode of conduct in the sphere of the freedom which, as they pray for the coming of the kingdom, is already given to them here and now on this side of the fulfillment of the prayer. Thus to pray the prayer does not excuse them from provisionally rebelling and battling the disorder in their own human thoughts and words and works. On the contrary, they cannot pray this prayer aright without in so doing being projected into this corresponding action of their own which is provisional but nonetheless serious in this particular sphere." [Barth, *The Christian Life*, pp. 212f., cited in Webster, pp. 209-210.]

While Jüngel explicates Barth's understanding of the Christian life lucidly and with acuity, Webster finds Jüngel to be more inclined to Luther's concentration on faith as trust than to Barth's concentration on the correspondence between our calling upon God to act and God's calling upon us to act.

Webster's book, written with admirable style, is unsurpassed in its presentation of Barth's account of human ethical agency.

Readers may wish to note the following printing errors:

p.71	line 11	"impossible" for "possible"
p.103	line 16	"unconditioned" for "conditioned"
p.106	line 19	"unlimited" for "a limited"
p.159	line 15	omit "only" before "exercise"
p.209	line 28	"mode" for "model"

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Materials for the Newsletter are always welcome. Please send comments, brief articles, news items, reviews or book notices, etc., to the Editor:

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